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February 24, 2011

Appropriations Committee

Senator Toni Harp and Representative Toni Walker, co-chairs

Testimony of Stuart L. Parnes

Executive Director, Connecticut Humanities Council

The Connecticut Humanities Council is a state-based affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities, incorporated in Connecticut as a 501(c)3 in 1973. We are supported through a combination of federal (NEH) funds, State of Connecticut appropriations, corporate and foundation grants, and private contributions. Since July 2003, our line-item appropriation has fallen under the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism, which next year will become a division of the Department of Economic and Community Development.

The Council acts as an advocate, partner, grant-maker and a developer of public programs. The mission of the Connecticut Humanities Council is to strengthen the civic and cultural life of Connecticut by bringing communities together to share our histories and traditions and to explore ideas that enrich all our lives.

Over the past dozen years, the State of Connecticut's total contribution of \$11,800,000 to the Heritage Advancement Grants has allowed us to leverage an additional \$33,800,000 in corporate, foundation and community gifts and matching and contributions. That \$45 million total investment has made a huge difference in the capacity of Connecticut's heritage organizations from Cornwall to Stonington and from Woodstock to Greenwich, to preserve their collections and archives, produce high quality public programming, and to use 21st century technologies to promote and share what they do. Each and every CHC grant and program is rigorously evaluated for effectiveness and community impact, and every one has direct economic impact to the state.

In the past 3 years alone, the CHC has provided 327 competitive grants to heritage organizations all across the state, for museums as important to the state's economy as Mystic Seaport and as critical to their own communities as New Haven's Ethnic Heritage Center or Waterbury's Mattatuck Museum. Together, these grants have raised the visibility of Connecticut's extraordinary history not only for residents of our 169 towns, but for the tourists who stream to our state not just to gamble, but to rediscover America's past and their own.

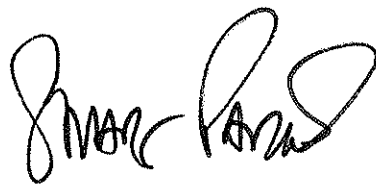
Sharing history is one key focus of the Humanities Council, reading for meaning is the other. At a time when Connecticut is struggling to close a widening education

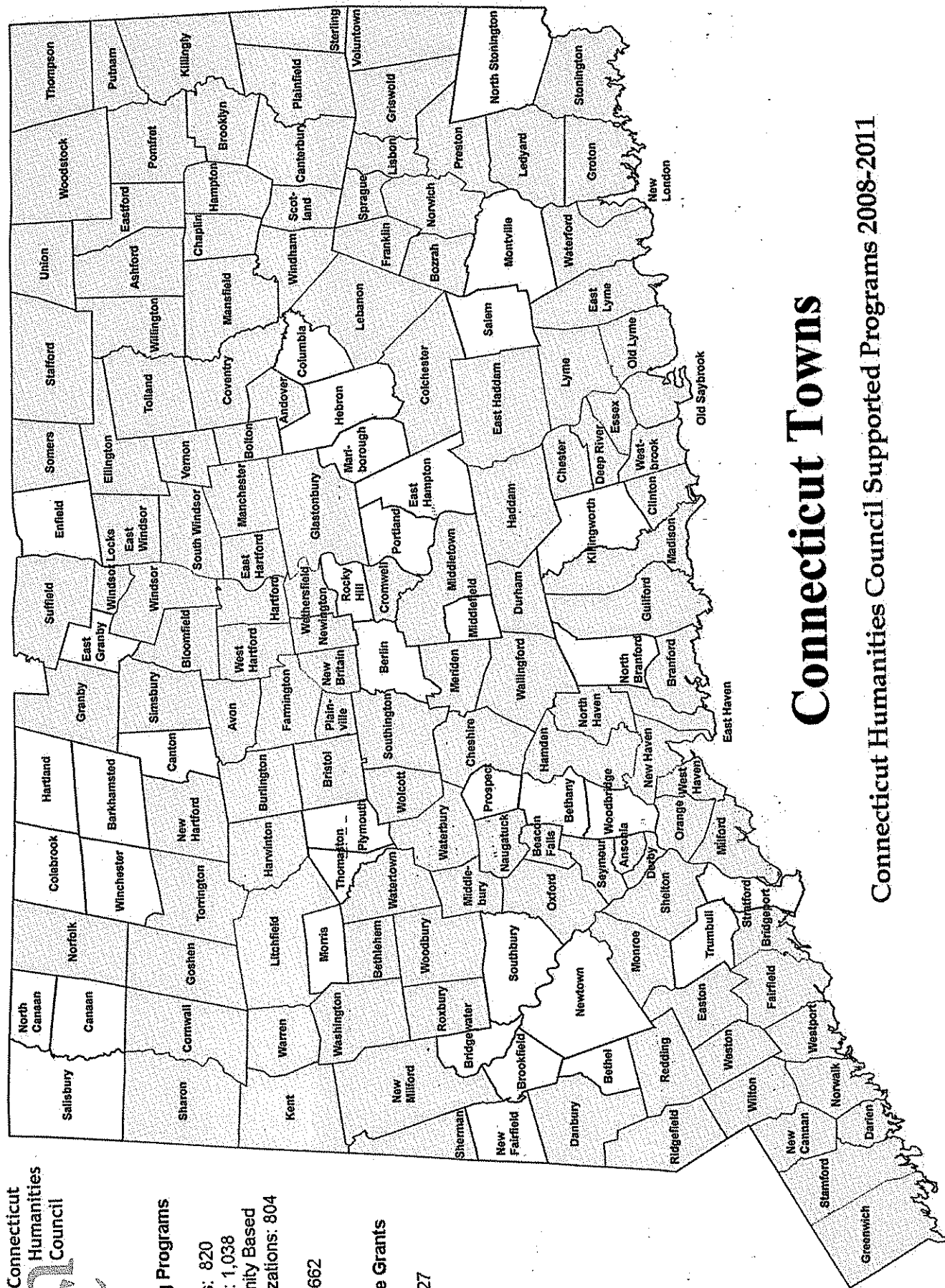
gap, CHC has leveraged federal and private foundation grants to help nurture a life-long love of reading in both children and adults. We have partnered with Connecticut's libraries to conduct over 800 reading programs which bring communities of readers together to explore great books and discuss great ideas. And over the same three years, we have organized more than 1300 programs in urban and rural schools and community centers to ignite a love of reading in students and their parents, and to help them comprehend what they read. Bridging Connecticut's racial and economic divides demands that this next generation can extract meaning from what they read and use that meaning to engage in civil dialogue.

The continued significant reduction of CHC's appropriation, as proposed in the governor's budget, will negatively impact all these programs, and all of Connecticut's citizens who benefit from them. And diminished state funds will inevitably result in diminished matching funds, compounding the impact around the state.

In the words of National Endowment for the Humanities Chairman Jim Leach: "Just as we need an infrastructure of roads and bridges, we need an infrastructure of ideas. In a splintered world, bridging cultures may be our most difficult challenge... It is the creativity and cultural understanding that the humanities instill which make America an enduring role model around the globe. Our humanities organizations are a national asset that we shortchange at our peril."

The Connecticut Humanities Council plays a critical role in connecting and enriching the lives of Connecticut's people. I look forward to working with you and the governor to maintain the strength of Connecticut's heritage institutions and the vital engagement of our citizens in both the past and the future of our state.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim Leach". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.



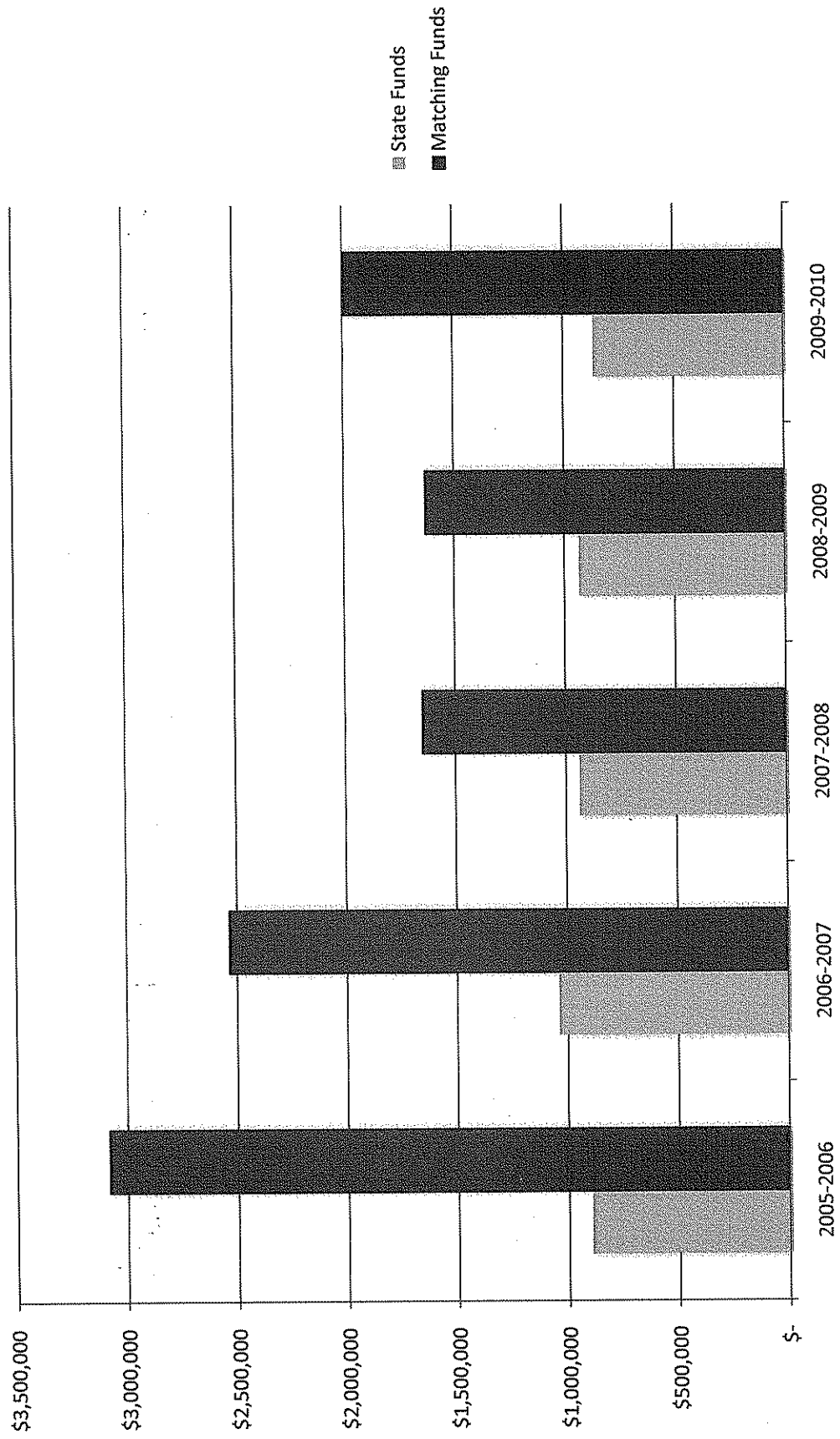
Connecticut Humanities Council Supported Programs 2008-2011

Libraries: 820
Schools: 1,038
Community Based Organizations: 804

Heritage Grants

Total: 327

Connecticut Humanities Council Impact of Granting Funds



Five Year Decline in Connecticut Humanities Council Appropriation

